

U.S. Test Stamps related to the BEP (ca. 1907-1959)

This one-frame traditional exhibit examines the introduction and development of Bureau of Engraving and Printing test items and tells about some of the technological developments in stamp printing and production that necessitated the creation of these stamp-like, non-accountable paper items. The cutoff date of the exhibit, circa 1959, was chosen because soon after the Bureau began to print the ubiquitous “For Testing Purposes Only” stamps.

Despite fairly wide distribution since about 1959, the earliest U.S. testing and dummy items are not encountered frequently, and most collectors know little of this fascinating area. They are only recently nearly fully covered in the *Scott U.S. Specialized Catalogue*, a process to which the creators of this exhibit contributed.

Testing and dummy stamps were created by stamp printers soon after postage stamps were devised. Internally they have been used to test printing presses, papers, perforators, slitting machines, gumming machines and processing equipment. For external purposes, test items have been created and distributed to test stamp affixers, vending machines and canceling machines; they have also been used in live mail tests and for equipment demonstrations.

Technically, possessing and collecting this material has always been unauthorized. This basically explains the extreme scarcity of most all early test and dummy material created and used by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and other stamp producers.

Most of the material in the exhibit is scarce to rare (usually with only a few examples known) and include the exhibitors’ new discoveries and other highlights:

- Page 2: One of three die proofs of the “Hamilton-head” dummy, but the **only one known** on India paper.
- Page 2: **Only known example** of large letterpress-printed die Hamilton-head proof.
- Page 3: Margin block of 18+ Hamilton-head test stamps from experimental run of Stickney rotary press; **only known example, with dated and signed notation**.
- Page 4: New discovery of a 1910 Minerva test stamp die proof on *glazed* card.
- Page 8: **Only reported block with selvage** of Stickney rotary press blank paper sample dummy stamps, dated 1936.
- Page 9: New discovery of a block of 1951 Stickney definitive-sized blank dummy stamps.
- Page 12: **Largest-known** block (34) of red-framed rectangle dummy, with plate number and splices.
- Page 13: **Only known** set of web-margin plate multiples (imperf and perf), red-framed rectangle test coil.
- Page 14: **Early recorded use** of purple-framed rectangle test, predating “Parade of Postal Progress” show by almost three months.
- Page 15: Left-side block cut from only-known bottom-margin multiple of reddish-violet framed rectangle dummy coil.

The exhibitors own examples of TD51, the brown George Washington, but have not included those in this exhibit because the Bureau of Engraving and Printing has no record of this dummy¹ and the origin of the stamps is unclear.*

Mike Perry, chairman of the Booklets and Booklet Panes Committee of the United States Stamp Society, stated that only one copy of booklet TDB1 is known and that has not been seen for over 45 years. He added, "TDB2 has not been seen for even longer – I know of nobody alive who has actually seen that booklet."² Additional comments regarding the rarity of these booklets and other early dummy booklets are discussed in "Research Paper #3."**

The exhibitors are actively searching for the only known use of a vertical pair of TD23 used on piece, last offered in an H.R. Harmer auction in February, 2005.

Although there is no comprehensive reference on this subject, the following are helpful:

2008 Durland Standard Plate Number Catalog, pp. A89-A91.

***Dummy Stamp Booklets*; United States Stamp Society Research Paper Number 3; September 1998.

Ken Lawrence; *Scott Stamp Monthly*, February, August, and November 1997; three articles on dummy stamps.

***Michael Perry; email dated August 1, 2008.

Scott 2011 Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers; pp. 869-873; 876.

*Larry S. Weiss; "The 5c Brown Mystery 'Stamp'"; *The United States Specialist*, May 1987, pp193-225.

Wayne Youngblood; "U.S. Test Coils Have Been Used Since 1910;" *Linn's Stamp News*, November 16, 1992, pp16-17.

Larry Zieler; "Dummy Coils – A Review and Checklist;" *The United States Specialist*, November 1979, pp 561-569.

Larry Zieler, "Dummy Coils – A Review and Checklist;" *The United States Specialist*, August 1979, pp 388-391, and November 1979, pp. 561-569.

Footnotes:

1. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, letter dated August 1, 2008.
2. Michael Perry, email dated August 8, 2008.